

PYQ VAULT · DAY 20 · LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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EDITION 2026

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560

questions

50

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10

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DAY 20

Local Government · 12 questions

Every question carries a **Flow Snapshot** — and a handwritten model answer on the channel.

“No PYQ will be unfamiliar.”

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 20 marks

The goal of good governance will be achieved only by strengthening the grass root level democracy.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** good governance = participatory / accountable / transparent / responsive → local bodies = first contact between citizen and state → statement broadly right, but turns on the meaning of “strengthening”
- R2** the word “only” is the crux → grassroots democracy is the foundation, yet the claim holds only if local democracy is genuinely empowered, not merely elected

Body flow

participation (identify / prioritise / monitor → better targeting + social audit) + inclusion + accountability → 73rd/74th, Articles 243G/243W → **Esther Duflo** (women-led panchayats → drinking water) → **Rao & Sanyal** (Gram Sabha = forum for the poor) → World Bank voice + accountability + subsidiarity (what can be done locally, done locally)

Counter-view

“only” too strong → grassroots democracy necessary, not sufficient → weak 3Fs, Pradhan-Pati control, bureaucratic interference, idle Ward Committees → **Aiyar**: panchayats not vested under 243G → formal decentralisation ≠ good governance

Conclusion routes

- R1** good governance flows from genuine strengthening, not mere existence → empowered Gram Sabhas + activity mapping + fiscal devolution + facilitating administration
- R2** statement holds when “strengthening” = substantive self-government → subsidiarity + accountable administration complete the link

Good governance is governance that is participatory, accountable, transparent, responsive and equitable. Grassroots democracy meets these tests directly, because local bodies are the first point of contact between the citizen and the state.

The statement is broadly correct, but its force depends on what "strengthening" means: real self-government, not the mere presence of elected councils. Grassroots democracy supports good governance on several counts. Participation lets citizens identify problems, set priorities and monitor delivery, which improves the targeting of welfare and makes social audit possible.

Inclusion brings women, dalits and Adivasis into decision-making, while direct accountability exposes local representatives to public scrutiny. The 73rd & 74th amendments gave this a constitutional base under Articles 243 G and 243 W.

Esther Duflo's work shows that women-led panchayats invest more in drinking water and Vijayendra Rao & Paromita Sanyal show that the Gram Sabha gives poor citizens a forum to raise their concerns. The World Bank's stress on voice & accountability & the principle of subsidiarity — that what can be done locally should be done locally — point the same way.

Where the 3 Fs of Funds, Functions & Functionaries remain weak & where Pradhan-Pati control, bureaucratic interference & idle ward committees persist, formal decentralisation does not yield good governance. Mami Shankar Aiyar argued that panchayats were never effectively vested with powers under Article 243 G.

Good governance therefore follows not from the existence of local democracy but from its genuine strengthening: empowered gram sabhas, activity mapping, fiscal devolution and an administration that facilitates rather than controls.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

Has the 73rd Constitutional Amendment empowered women in panchayats in India? Discuss

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Art 243D reserves $\geq 1/3$ seats + chairperson posts → frame: has presence become power?
- R2 reservation = one of India's largest democratic transformations → but numbers alone ≠ power

Body flow

Art 243D reservation → scale: ~10 lakh women, 37%, Bihar 54% → first-time entry incl. SC/ST → presence → participation → **Buch** (regular attendance) → **Chattopadhyay & Duflo** (drinking water / public goods) → **Rao & Sanyal** (Gram Sabha questions local inequalities)

Counter-view

formal entry ≠ control → **Pai's** "Pati Panchayat" (husbands / male kin govern in her name) → **Mohanty** (household burden, weak training, official non-cooperation) → **Pande** (rotation blocks re-election)

Conclusion routes

- R1 **Fraser**: reservation = affirmative remedy (secures presence); transformative empowerment needs training, safety, devolution
- R2 real in representation, unfinished in substance → door opened, project incomplete

The 73rd Amendment 1992 did more than build a uniform Panchayati Raj structure. Through Article 243D it reserved not less than one-third of seats & chairperson posts for women. The question is whether this presence has become power.

The reservation produced one of India's largest democratic transformations. By the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's appraisal, nearly 10 lakh women sat in Panchayati Raj institutions, about 37% of all elected members, rising to 54% in Bihar.

In part, presence has become participation. Nirmala Buch views women members attend meetings more regularly than men.

Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo show that women-headed Panchayats invest more in drinking water & public goods.

Vijayendra Rao & Paromita Sanyal show the Gram Sabha lets poor women raise problems and question local inequalities.

But formal entry has not always meant control. Sudha Pai's "Pati Panchayat" captures how husbands and male relatives govern in a woman's name. Bidyut Mohanty points to household burdens, weak training and official non-cooperation, while Rohini Pande argues that rotating reserved seats blocks re-election.

Following Nancy Fraser, reservation is an affirmative remedy that secures presence; transformative empowerment, which alters power relations, still needs training, safety and devolution. The amendment has empowered women substantially in representation, but the deeper project remains unfinished.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 10 marks

New Panchayat Raj is an effective instrument for women empowerment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** 73rd Amendment: 1/3 seats + chairperson posts reserved, many states to 50% → New Panchayat Raj as a *real instrument* → entry point, not finished achievement
- R2** **Gandhi**: no Swaraj/decentralisation without women in public life → 73rd Amendment turns that into guaranteed seats → effective as opening, partial as outcome

Body flow

reach: 10 lakh+ women elected → **Palnitkar**: 70–80% first-time representatives → presence shifts priorities → **Chattopadhyay & Duflo**: more drinking-water investment → **Iyer & Mani**: women report crimes/injustice more openly

Counter-view

presence ≠ power → **Sudha Pai**'s "Pati Panchayat": male relatives control elected women → **Manor**: council meetings deny women the right to speak

Conclusion routes

- R1** effective instrument of entry → real empowerment needs training, safety, easing of patriarchy
- R2** real but incomplete → task is moving from reserved presence to actual power

The 73rd amendment reserves not less than one-third of all seats, along with chairperson posts, for women and many states have raised this to 50%. This makes New Panchayat Raj a real instrument of women's empowerment, though more as an entry point than a finished achievement.

The numbers show its reach. Over 10 lakh women now hold panchayat seats, and Sneha Palnitkar found that 70-80% were first-time representatives. Their presence has shifted priorities. Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo show that women-led panchayats invest more in drinking water. Lakshmi Iyer and Anandi Mani find that women report crimes & injustice more openly.

However, presence is not always power. Sudha Pai describes the "Pati Panchayat", where male relatives control elected women and James Manor notes that council meetings often deny women the right to speak.

New Panchayat Raj is therefore an effective instrument of entry, but real empowerment still needs training, safety and the easing of patriarchy.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 20 marks

Examine the provisions of Panchayat Extension Services Act (PESA), 1996.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 73rd Amendment skips Fifth Schedule areas → Centre's special responsibility → PESA extends Part IX while protecting tribal custom
- R2 Bhuria Committee origin → "Constitution within the Constitution" → Gram Sabha, not elected Panchayat, made the seat of self-rule

Body flow

4(a) state laws in consonance with customary law → 4(b) natural habitation/hamlet as village → 4(c) every village a Gram Sabha → 4(d) Gram Sabha safeguards customs, identity, resources, dispute resolution → 4(e) approves plans, selects beneficiaries → real powers: minor forest produce, water bodies, markets, money lending, intoxicants, land alienation → authority shifts Panchayat → Gram Sabha → Samatha upholds tribal resource control

Counter-view

promise on paper → state laws dilute PESA, power returned to Panchayat, line/forest departments override Gram Sabha → **Dandekar**: Gram Sabha authority not made superior → **Bijoy**: unfinished agenda

Conclusion routes

- R1 radical in design, incomplete in practice
- R2 realisation depends on bending state law and bureaucracy to the Gram Sabha

The 73rd amendment did not automatically apply to the 5th schedule areas, where the centre carries special responsibility. PESA 1996 was enacted on the recommendations of the Dilip Singh Bhuria committee to extend Part IX into these scheduled areas while respecting tribal custom and community control.

Often called a "Constitution within the constitution", its central move is to make not the elected Panchayat but the Gram Sabha the seat of self-rule. The provisions build on this. State panchayat laws must stay in consonance with customary law and the traditional management of community resources.

The village is the natural habitation or hamlet, not merely an administrative population, and every such village has a Gram Sabha. That Gram Sabha is made competent to safeguard customs, cultural identity, community resources and customary dispute resolution. It also approves development plans and selects beneficiaries under poverty programmes.

Real powers follow - over minor forest produce, minor water bodies, village markets, money lending and intoxicants and the power to prevent and restore land alienation. Authority thus shifts from the Gram Panchayat to the Gram Sabha, an idea the Samatha judgment strengthened by upholding tribal control over community resources.

But the promise stays largely on paper. State laws dilute PESA, power is handed back to the Panchayat and line & forest departments override the Gram Sabha.

Ajay Dandekar argues that Gram Sabha authority is nowhere made superior to these departments, leaving PESA, in C.R. Bijoy's words, "an unfinished agenda" - radical in design, incomplete in practice.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Political decentralization has not been matched by administrative decentralization at the grass roots level. Explain

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 political = elected bodies | administrative = functions / staff / planning → 73rd–74th gave elections, reservation, three tiers → administrative power stayed with states
- R2 India a leader in political decentralisation but a laggard in administrative → why do elected bodies still lack governing power

Body flow

Art. 243G leaves devolution to state law → states keep planning + budgeting → Panchayats lack control over health, education, public works, staff → parastatals / line departments run core services + MPLADS bypass → **Brass**: resistance as rival patronage → fiscal dependence on grants → incomplete 3Fs

Counter-view

mismatch not uniform → Kerala's participatory planning devolved further → cause is political will, not a constitutional bar

Conclusion routes

- R1 World Bank gap: high political, low administrative → elected but not self-governing
- R2 real self-government needs functions + finances + staff, not elections alone

Political decentralisation means elected local bodies ; administrative decentralisation means transferring functions , staff and planning power to them. The 73rd & 74th amendments delivered the first: regular elections , reservations and a three-tier structure.

But administrative authority stayed with the states, leaving local bodies elected without real power. Article 243 G leaves actual devolution to state legislation , so states keep planning and budgeting , while Panchayats lack control over health , education , public works & their own staff. Parastatals and line departments run water, sanitation and housing and schemes like MPLADS bypass Panchayats.

Paul Brass argues legislators resist devolution because empowered local bodies could become rival centres of patronage. Fiscal dependence on grants deepens this , leaving the 3Fs - Functions, Funds , Functionaries - incomplete.

The mismatch is not uniform : where states showed political will, as in Kerala, devolution went further. Still, world bank studies confirm the gap - India ranks high on political decentralisation but near the bottom on administrative. Without real functions, finances and staff, grassroots bodies remain elected, not self-governing.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

To what extent has 73rd and 74th amendments of the Indian constitution enhanced women's empowerment?

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 one of the largest entries of women into elective office → “to what extent” = how far presence becomes power
- R2 reservation opened the third tier to women → empowerment tested by the gap between formal entry and substantive power

Body flow

one-third seats + chairperson posts, up to 50% (Bihar, MP), rural and urban → lakhs enter, mostly first-timers (**Palnitkar**) → presence reshapes priorities: public goods / drinking water (**Chattopadhyay & Duflo**) + psychological confidence, reporting injustice (**Iyer**) → gain is political + psychological + developmental

Counter-view

entry ≠ authority → proxy rule, “Pati Panchayat” (**Sudha Pai**) → patriarchy, low literacy, poor training, bureaucratic exclusion, seat rotation blocks re-election → urban corporators often lack a women's agenda (**Nanivdekar**) → substantive empowerment stays uneven

Conclusion routes

- R1 decisive in representation, meaningful in voice and priorities → substantive gain still unfinished
- R2 presence achieved; power contingent on capacity, safety and dismantling patriarchy

The 73rd and 74th amendments produced one of the largest entries of women into elective office in India, yet the real question is how far presence has converted into power.

By reserving not less than one-third of seats and chairperson posts - raised to half in states like Bihar and MP, across rural and urban bodies, the amendments brought lakhs of women into public decision-making. Sneha Palnitkar found that 70-80% of these representatives were first-time entrants, many from households with little formal schooling.

This presence has reshaped priorities: Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo show that women pradhans invest more in drinking water and other public goods, while Lakshmi Iyer links women's representation to greater confidence in reporting injustice. The gain is thus political, psychological & developmental.

Entry, however, is not the same as authority. Proxy rule - Sudha Pai's "Pati Panchayat" - lets male relatives run the office in a woman's name. Patriarchy, low literacy, poor training and bureaucratic exclusion limit real influence and rotation of reserved seats blocks re-election.

In cities, Medha Nanivdekar notes that women corporators often lack a distinct women's agenda. The Amendments have therefore enhanced empowerment decisively in representation and meaningfully in voice and priorities, but substantive empowerment stays uneven - a large gain that remains unfinished.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 15 marks

Do you think that despite having significant limitations the Panchayati Raj Institutions have strengthened the process of democratic decentralization? Give your views.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** define democratic decentralisation (functions + resources to elected local reps for direct participation) → stake verdict: strengthened, but unfinished
- R2** start from the concession in the question (limitations granted) → argue the third tier has still struck real democratic roots → same spine

Body flow

73rd Amendment constitutional base (Gram Sabha, three-tier, regular elections, State Election Commission, reservations) → Art. 243G + Eleventh Schedule (economic development + social justice) → **George Mathew**: democratic base broadened → women / SCs / STs enter elected office + Gram Sabha as participatory watchdog → **Esther Duflo**: women-headed Panchayats invest more in drinking water → *who governs shapes outcomes*

Counter-view

3Fs devolved unevenly, real power stays with states → parallel schemes + bureaucratic dominance → World Bank: high political but low administrative decentralisation → **Jaffrelot**: decentralisation can also harden local dominance

Conclusion routes

- R1** citizens gained voice, choice, decision-making space → strengthening genuine but incomplete
- R2** political decentralisation achieved; completing it needs real devolution of funds, functions, functionaries

Democratic decentralisation means the transfer of functions and resources to elected representatives at lower levels so that citizens share directly in governance.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions have strengthened the process, even though the work stays unfinished. The 73rd amendment gave panchayats a constitutional base - Gram Sabhas, a 3-tier structure, regular elections, a state election commission and reservations. Article 243 G and the 11th Schedule linked them to local economic development and social justice.

George Mathew sees this as a major broadening of the country's democratic base. Lakhs of women, SCs & STs entered elected office, and the Gram Sabha grew into a participatory watchdog over local works. According to Esther Duflo, women-headed Panchayats invests more in drinking water, showing that who governs actually shapes outcomes.

The limitations are real. Funds, functions and functionaries are developed unevenly and real power often stays with the states. Parallel schemes and bureaucratic dominance further weaken Panchayat authority. World Bank findings place India high in political but low in administrative decentralisation. Christophe Jaffrelot cautions that decentralisation can democratisise but may also harden local dominance.

On balance, Panchayats have given ordinary citizens voice, choice and a real place in decision-making. The strengthening is genuine, though clearly incomplete.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 15 marks

“The Panchayats with Gram Sabhas should be so organised as to identify the resources locally available for the development in agricultural and industrial sectors.” Examine the statement in the context of Gram Swaraj.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Gram Swaraj = **Gandhi's** self-reliant village reconstruction → statement names its economic core
- R2 power to people + village meets own needs → organise Panchayats with Gram Sabhas to identify local resources

Body flow

economic base of Gram Swaraj (efficiency, local resources + workforce, conservation, equity, employment) → Gram Sabha's direct role (identify land/water/labour/forests/cattle/produce → classify households → set priorities) → village industries on local raw material (oil pressing, soap, dairying, compost) → agriculture-industry link (raw material → absorb unemployment → cut post-harvest loss) → cooperation: All India Village Industries Association → Kuthambakkam / **R. Elango** network economy

Counter-view

constitutional base ≠ enough → needs devolution of funds, functions, functionaries → weak Gram Sabhas, poor attendance, elite capture cripple resource planning

Conclusion routes

- R1 Gram Swaraj = decentralised economic democracy, not merely administrative local government
- R2 mass employment over mass production → self-reliant, ethical village development

Gram Swaraj is Mahatma Gandhi's model of self-reliant village reconstruction, where the village meets its own needs & power lies with the people. The 2022 statement captures its economic core.

Panchayats with Gram Sabhas must be organised to identify and use locally available resources for agriculture and village industry. Gram Swaraj rests on economic efficiency, the use of local resources and workforce, conservation, equity and employment through village industries. The Gram Sabha, a direct democratic forum, can identify local land, water, labour, forests, cattle wealth and farm produce, classify households and set priorities.

Village industries such as oil pressing, soap making, dairying & compost manure use this local raw material. Gandhi tied agriculture to industry: farm produce supplies raw material, village industries absorb rural employment and cooperatives give economic strength while cutting post-harvest losses.

He founded the All India Village Industries Association for cooperative production. The KuthambakKam Panchayat under R. Elango shows how a self-reliant network economy can be built among neighbouring villages.

The promise is real but conditional. The 73rd amendment gives Panchayats a constitutional base, yet Gram Swaraj needs real devolution of funds, functions and functionaries; weak Gram Sabhas, poor attendance and elite control cripple local resource planning.

Gram Swaraj is decentralised economic democracy - mass employment over mass production - not merely administrative local government.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 20 marks

Examine the unique features of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Do you think this Amendment would contribute in achieving the goal of empowerment of marginalised sections of the society?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 73rd CAA gave PRIs constitutional life + wrote marginalised entry into the design itself → so empowerment hinges on how far states let it work

R2 unique = a mandatory democratic floor fused with guaranteed reservation → real question: does the floor convert into real power?

Body flow

Part IX + Eleventh Schedule (1993) → statutory → constitutional self-government → three-tier + Gram Sabha + five-year SEC elections + State Finance Commission → Art 243G + 29 subjects → Art 243D reservation (SC/ST by population, ≥1/3 women, chairpersons) → compulsory “skeleton” vs voluntary devolution of functions/funds/staff (“flesh and blood”) → **Mathew**: widening of democratic base → **Chattopadhyay & Duflo**: women heads → drinking water, SC heads → SC hamlets → presence ≠ authority

Counter-view

“half-baked cake” → elite control, weak education, poor support blunt marginal voices (**Patnaik**) → reservation gives seats, not authority; real devolution left to states

Conclusion routes

R1 necessary, not sufficient → opens the door; genuine devolution of funds, functions, functionaries + social change must walk through it

R2 empowerment enabled by design, delivered only when the skeleton gains flesh — guaranteed presence must become real authority

The 73rd amendment did not simply create local bodies; it gave them constitutional life and wrote marginalised entry into their very design. Whether that design empowers depends on how far the states allow it to work.

By adding Part IX and the XIth schedule in 1993, the act turned Panchayati Raj institutions from statutory bodies into constitutional units of self-government. Its unique features form a mandatory democratic floor: a uniform 3-tier structure, the Gram Sabha as a direct village assembly, regular 5-year elections held by an independent state election commission and a state finance commission to review panchayat finances. Article 243G links Panchayats to 29 development subjects.

The most distinctive feature is reservation under Article 243D - seats for SCs and STs in proportion to population, and not less than one-third for women, reaching even chairperson posts.

Yet the act fixed only the compulsory "skeleton"; the transfer of functions, funds and staff was left voluntary to states, with the "flesh and blood" still to be added.

On guaranteed presence, the gains are real. George Mathew calls the Act "a tremendous widening of the democratic base of the country". Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo show that women-headed villages invest more in drinking water and that Schedule Caste heads invest more in their own hamlets.

But presence is not authority. Often called a "half-baked cake", the act lets elite control, weak education and poor support blunt marginal voices, as Pratyuana Patnaik notes. The Amendment is therefore necessary for empowerment, not sufficient. It opens the door; genuine devolution of funds, functions & functionaries with social change, must walk through it.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 20 marks

Discuss the major provisions of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. Do you think that the Act remains an ‘unfulfilled dream’? Argue your case.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 74th CAA gave cities a constitutional voice → form built, but is the substance real?

R2 urban governance long neglected → Part IX-A finally constitutionalised municipalities → promise vs delivery

Body flow

Part IX-A + Arts 243P–243ZG + Twelfth Schedule → three municipal types (Nagar Panchayat / Council / Corporation) → ward elections + 5-yr term → SC/ST/women reservation incl. chairperson → SEC + SFC → Art 243W + 18 functions → Ward Committees + DPC/MPC → turn: form without substance → devolution left to state discretion → parastatals + SPVs bypass councils → mayors ceremonial, commissioners hold power → planning committees idle → **Ahluwalia** (unwillingness to devolve funds + responsibility) → **Raghunandan** (councils as “mere agents”)

Counter-view

dream not empty → constitutional status + regular polls + reservation = democratic floor → women + weaker sections enter urban government → what is missing is power, not presence

Conclusion routes

R1 structure of urban democracy built, but no authority / money / accountability → unfulfilled, not abandoned → awaiting completion

R2 shift needed: from constitutional framework to real self-government → empower mayors, councils, Ward Committees, municipal finance → then the dream is met

The 74th Amendment, effective 1 June 1993, gave India's cities a constitutional voice. It inserted Part IX-A and the 12th schedule, turning municipalities into recognised institutions of self-government.

Its provisions built a full democratic architecture. The Act created 3 municipal categories - Nagar Panchayat, Municipal Council and Municipal Corporation. Each has direct ward elections and a 5-year term. Seats are reserved for SCs, STs and not less than one-third for women, including chairperson posts. State Election and Finance Commissions were to run polls and review finances. Article 243 W & the 12th schedule's 18 functions covered urban planning, water and sanitation with Ward committees and district & Metropolitan planning committees for participatory planning.

Yet much remains on paper. The act gave form without substance: devolution of functions, finances and staff was left to state discretion.

Isher Judge Ahluwalia traces this to the "unwillingness of the system to devolve responsibility and funding to the city level" ; T.R. Raghunandan finds local governments reduced to "mere agents to do the bidding of higher-level governments."

The dream is not empty, though. Constitutional status, regular elections and reservation gave cities a democratic floor and brought women and weaker sections into urban government. The Act built the structure of urban democracy but lacks the authority, money and accountability to make it work. It remains an unfulfilled dream - not abandoned, but awaiting completion.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 15 marks

Gram Sabha in the Panchayati Raj system is a forum which gives expression to the collective wisdom, aspirations and the will of the people. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Article 243A → Gram Sabha = assembly of all village voters → only direct-democracy tier → statement captures its promise
- R2 forum where collective wisdom + aspirations + will find direct expression → but promise real only where the forum works

Body flow

statutory functions (plans, beneficiaries, social audit, accounts) → villagers as direct decision-makers → **Baviskar**: participatory democracy for Dalits, women, Adivasis → **Sanyal & Rao**: largest deliberative institution in human history

Counter-view

uneven functioning → thin attendance, elite dominance, marginalised silent, agenda shrinks to beneficiary lists → **Mansuri & Rao**: benefit reaches the disadvantaged only where Sabhas actually meet → **Kothari**: symbolic without mobilisation → **Jayal**: limited devolution weakens it

Conclusion routes

- R1 such a forum by design more than by performance
- R2 realising collective will needs clear powers + binding social audit + assured quorum + fiscal devolution

Article 243 A recognises the Gram Sabha as the assembly of all village voters and the only tier of Panchayati Raj based on direct democracy. The statement captures its promise well: here the collective wisdom, aspirations and will of villagers find direct expression.

But this promise holds only where the forum truly works. The Gram Sabha expresses this will through its functions: it approves development plans, selects beneficiaries, audits public works and reviews accounts, making villagers direct decision-makers rather than distant voters.

B.S. Baviskar sees it as participatory democracy that lets Dalits, women and Adivasis shape decisions. Paromita Sanyal and Vijayendra Rao call it one of the largest deliberative institutions in human history.

In practice, functioning is uneven. Attendance is thin, elite groups dominate, women and the marginalised often stay silent and the agenda shrinks to beneficiary lists rather than real deliberation. Ghazala Mansuri and Rao show that the benefit reaches the disadvantaged mainly in villages that actually hold these meetings.

Rajni Kothari argues that without awareness & social mobilisation, the forum may remain symbolic and Niraja Gopal Jayal shows that limited devolution weakens it.

The Gram Sabha is therefore such a forum by design more than by performance. Making collective will real needs clear powers, binding social audit, assured quorum and genuine fiscal devolution.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 20 marks

Enunciate the impediments to women's participation in local governance in the process of political decentralisation.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 73rd/74th reserved 1/3 seats + chairperson posts → 10 lakh+ women entered → presence achieved
- R2 decentralisation widened entry, not participation → impediments sit in the gap between presence and power

Body flow

proxy control most visible ("Pati Panchayat", **Sudha Pai**; male relatives attend – **Susheela Kaushik**) → rests on patriarchy (purdah, mobility curbs, male-leadership-as-natural; 2004 Haryana study) → capability deficit (low education/training → dependence on officials + male kin) → double burden (household + family interference + no official cooperation – **Bidyut Mohanty**) → institutional hostility inside councils (presence unacknowledged, not allowed to speak/seek info, no-confidence misused – **James Manor**) → security + economic dependence + digital divide → structural flaw: rotation of reserved seats blocks re-election (**Rohini Pande**)

Counter-view

impediments are not a case against reservation → same decentralisation shifted local priorities (water/health/education) where women act freely → barriers are removable, not inherent

Conclusion routes

- R1 door opened by decentralisation; substantive participation needs the second step – capacity, safety, longer tenure, curbing proxy
- R2 reservation gave the seat; converting seat into voice means breaking patriarchy + institutional resistance

Political decentralisation through the 73rd & 74th amendments reserved not less than one-third of seats and chairperson posts for women, bringing more than ten lakh women into local bodies. But this formal entry has not always become real participation.

The impediments lie in the gap between presence & power. Sudha Pai coined the term "Pati Panchayat" to show how husbands and male relatives often control elected women, who function as rubber-stamp authorities. Susheela Kaushik notes that male relatives attend meetings in their place.

This proxy control rests on patriarchy. Male leadership is seen as natural, and purdah & restrictions on mobility confine women to the domestic sphere. Low education and training leave women dependent on officials and male kin.

The double burden compounds this. Bidyut Mohanty points to household responsibilities, family interference, lack of training and lack of official cooperation as recurring bottlenecks.

Within councils, James Manar finds open discrimination: women are not acknowledged, not allowed to speak or seek information, and no-confidence provisions are misused.

Security threats, economic dependence on family funds and a digital divide in e-governance deepen the problem. Rohini

Pande adds that rotation of reserved seats blocks re-election and long-term political careers.

These impediments are not arguments against reservation; the same decentralisation has shifted local priorities towards water, health and education where women function freely. Political decentralisation has opened the door; substantive participation now needs capacity building, safety, longer tenure and curbs on proxy control.

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